RECENT WAR LYRICS

LEONA WHITWORTH LOGUE

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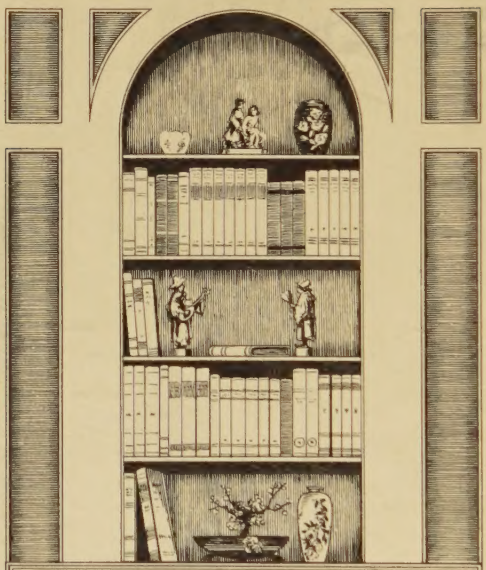
Mary W. Eckler



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RECENT WAR LYRICS

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RECENT WAR LYRICS

A Study of War Concepts in Modern Lyrics

BY

LEONA WHITWORTH LOGUE

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

ROBERT MORSS LOVETT

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INTRODUCTION

WAR has always been one of the great themes of poetry. Indeed, the demand of the conqueror for fit celebration of his victories was the chief reason for the existence of the poet among primitive peoples. "O for a bard to sing of deeds he dare not emulate" has been a cry of heroes and clans and nations. The great epics of all races have been poems of war.

With the advance of civilization poetry has, it is true, found other subjects. Love, human character, social life, nature have occupied increasingly the minds of poets. English poetry, from Wordsworth on, has found its chief subject in natural scene. Nevertheless, the strain of war remains a leading one in the last century from Scott to Kipling. That war was the greatest nurse of human character, of heroic deeds, and of social virtues such as patriotism and sacrifice, was a cardinal article of faith. Tennyson is a perfect exemplification of this faith in his *Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington* and *Ballad of the Revenge*, and in the concluding odes of *Maud*.

The change in the attitude of poets toward war, which it is the purpose of Mrs. Logue's volume to illustrate, is one of the most significant aspects of poetry in our time. The change is in part due to the

change in the nature of war itself. From being a splendid pageant which served as a background for the genius and courage of individual leaders, it has become an industry, an affair of engineering and chemistry, involving all the ugly features of the industrial system. This is one objection which Ruskin makes to modern war: another is the fact that instead of being fought by those whose interests are at stake, it is to-day fought by common men, peasants and artisans, into whose hearts mutual hate is poured by propaganda, and whose lives are sacrificed to national prestige and power which are of no real value to them.

The poets of the Great War are divided into two schools, those who still preserve the tradition of war as a great theme of patriotism and national glory, and those who look upon it in its real character. The latter have felt the influence of two movements which were progressing in the nineteenth century—that of intellectual enlightenment and that of realism of artistic treatment. The presentations of the modern school of war poetry are realistic. Instead of seizing on spectacular incidents, they dwell on the ugly and atrocious details of actual trench warfare, and the reactions of the common soldier to them. It is perhaps not too much to see in their attitude as opposed to that of their predecessors a sign that wars themselves shall cease.

ROBERT MORSS LOVETT.

NEW YORK
December, 1927

FOREWORD

THIS study owes its origin to the fact that the writer has been an interested reader of war verse published in journals, magazines, and reviews since August, 1914, and has been greatly impressed with the fine quality and spirit of many of these poems.

The poets, of course, as Mr. Clarence Edward Andrews observes in the preface to his book, *From the Front*, "are not the mere rank and file. . . . The average soldier's gun is mightier than his pen. . . . The songs which Tommy Atkins sings are not very interesting without Tommy to sing them:

> We've each our Tipperary—near by or wildly far;
> For some it means a fireside, for some it means a star;
> For some it means a journey by homely roads they know;
> For some a spirit's venture where none but theirs may go.

"The forms of expression for men of action are naturally the brief ones, familiar letters and short lyrics." Their themes—patriotism, war, love—are set descants of the lyrist, but the feeling, the music, the mood is everything.

Among modern war poets, the lyric has conformed more and more to the complexities, the doubts, and the experimentation of our intricate modern life.

The term "lyric" has always been of uncertain usage. In his book, *The Lyric*, Mr. Drinkwater asserts in conclusion of his analysis that "the characteristic of the lyric is that it is the product of the pure poetic energy unassociated with other energies, and that lyric and poetry are synonymous terms."

Leona Whitworth Logue.

Columbus, Ohio,
1927

RECENT WAR LYRICS

He's gone.
I do not understand.
I only know
That as he turned to go
And waved his hand
In his young eyes a sudden glory shone:
And I was dazzled by a sunset glow,
And he was gone.[1]

In 1914, when all Europe plunged into that unbelievably mad chaos of war, the poets of England started out with the conventional war reactions of the poets of the past. England was in danger. England called upon her sons for help. And England's sons harkened to her call. All should be a glorious victory. "Britons never shall be slaves." "Theirs not to reason why."

The "sudden glory" of patriotism is an emotion that war has inspired in poets and soldiers of all time. The call to sacrifice self for a great cause, to fight for a dearly beloved home and home-folk and homeland and to go forth and perform dazzling, heroic deeds for them in some far land is never left unanswered.

The poets of the past found in the war-that-

inspired-patriotism much that they could glorify. Some even seemed to confuse the noble things done during war with war itself and somehow found in war splendor, beauty, and inspiration.

Some wrote eulogies; and for their country's sake some have been known deliberately to misrepresent war in order to win military support in time of stress. Take, for example, seventeenth-century Drayton and his stirring "Agincourt," Campbell and his "Battle of the Baltic," and Tennyson and his "Revenge."

The lyrics of the past observed certain conventions: for instance, the hypocrisy of bravado. The poets must pretend that soldiers are never afraid, never homesick, that they never hate war. Their verse must be of the ringing, swashbuckling variety. The stimulation of battle was their one great-war-reaction.

The older poets first viewed the chaos of 1914 from afar. In their Morris chairs at home they closed their eyes and pictured wonderful heroic scenes. Then they loaded their fountain pens and bravely answered England's call. And their poems praising the pomp and circumstance of war, the lust for conflict, and the confidence in strength of arms are perhaps best typified by Kipling's "For All We Have and Are" and Bridges' "Wake Up, England!" [2] But despite Kipling's sturdy dictum:

> For all we have and are,
> For all our children's fate,
> Stand up and meet the war.
> The Hun is at the gate!

and Bridges' Tennysonian lines:

> Thou careless, awake!
> Thou peacemaker, fight!
> Stand England for honour
> And God guard the Right!

we are somehow left rather cold—unresponsive to the old-time motif.

Thomas Hardy's "Men Who March Away," with its plain patriotic vigor does more toward stirring our hearts:

> What of the faith and fire within us
> Men who march away
> Ere the barn-cocks say
> Night is growing gray,
> The hazards whence no tears can win us;
> What of the faith and fire within us
> Men who march away?
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Is it a purblind prank, O think you,
> Friend with the musing eye,
> Who watch us stepping by
> With doubt and dolorous sigh?
> Can so much pondering so hoodwink you!
> Is it a purblind prank, O think you,
> Friend with the musing eye? [3]

But while the stay-at-home poets were writing recruiting verse, there were many soldier-poets plunging into the battlefields and answering the call of Patriotism. And war gave these soldiers many things. Some found in it a release from certain of

life's uglinesses and conventions. Schoolboys left dull textbooks and bank clerks their humdrum ledgers as gladly as did medieval folk, yearning for the excitement of a crusade, forsake their dull existence at home. In war their repressed emotionalism found a certain outlet. Others, in the trenches, were taught the first lessons of democracy. Rich and poor shared alike in their cooties and dugouts, their drills and their thrills, their joys and their sorrows, and all found in war a certain heroism that had escaped them in their every-day worlds of the past. They learned to master physical fear. They learned endurance and enterprise. They learned to explore their own minds and souls and to think more about life and death and the universe. And they learned to think about others. With the romanticists this meant for the most part an aesthetic thrill in the beauties of self-sacrifice, in the joy of dying for their country. With the realists this thought for others was more constructive; it meant chiefly the showing up of the ugliness and futility of war in order to prevent the sacrifice of the millions of young soldiers of tomorrow. This is something of what war did to her soldiers and to her soldier poets.

It is interesting to note that at about the time of the world's political shake-up there was a poetic upheaval as well. Whitman in his day foreshadowed this poetic renascence, but it was not actually started until the year 1911, when Miss Monroe began publishing the magazine called *Poetry*. And it was not until the war that the new poetry was thoroughly

on its feet. The new poetry tried to express the times, to become more simple and sincere, more vivid and concrete, and to show a greater democratic freedom both in spirit and in form. Although the English poets experimented less in freer rhymes and rhythms than did their American brothers and sisters, yet they too began to show signs of becoming restless and analytical, to see clearly the beauties of the commonplace, and to discard all trite and booky themes, as well as all Victorian moralizings, rhetorical phrases, poetic diction, and certain other meaningless pretty Swinburnisms.

The war, then, was a great forcing ground for poets — but all were not poets who were forced.

Among the better known poets of 1914 were Alfred Noyes, John Masefield, and Wilfrid Gibson.

Alfred Noyes in his Tennysonian peace poems, his heroic romantic ballads, and his facile fairy lyrics was a typical Victorian. His moralizing abstractions, his picturesque phrases, and his swinging musical rhythms confirm this. Like a society settlement worker, Noyes pities the poor—from the seclusion of an electric tram; but he never really knew his flower girls or his organ grinders. He was more at home in the fairy forest of wild thyme, in Sherwood with Robin Hood, or upon the high seas with Drake, that

> Poor little chawed-up chap
> With a soul like a North Sea Storm.

Masefield was the rugged sea-poet of his day, a vagabond who had knocked around the world. He saw life through the eyes of the rough sailor and the man of the streets. His poems are distinctly democratic. And those that are not definite sea pictures or scenes of English countrysides are dramatic tales, wherein the beauty of romance jostles the grimness of realism. It was in these days before the war that Masefield was singing about the contrasting cargoes of the past and the present, of a spring day on Tewksbury Road, or of a storm at sea.

Gibson in the days shortly before the war had turned from romanticism to realism. He was beginning to revolt against rosy dreams and to picture, with terrible simplicity and a powerful human sympathy, poor folk and how they had been wronged. He had already begun his stark, grim, dramatic monologues, impressively picturing the humdrum grind for daily bread and the tragedies of unemployment and other problems of the poor. In those days he was writing of lovers on Hampstead Heath, of workhouse imbeciles, of shivering match venders. And in simple dignified language, he was revealing the souls of day laborers, of tramps on Bloodybush Edge, of circus clowns, and of Gentlemen Johns.

Among England's younger poets who, to a certain extent, had begun writing before the war were Rupert Brooke and Siegfried Sassoon. Of the two, Brooke at this time was the better known. He was already heard singing of Youth and Beauty and Love and Romantic Disillusion. He was singing

of woodland beauty spoiled by the quacking platitudes of a discordant human being, of Pacific paradises, and of his passion for life; he was also singing of Platonism, of the old Grant Chester vicarage, and of honey for tea. The modern spirit is seen in his early work. He mixes the beautiful with the ugly, and often gives us vivid detailed pictures of the commonplace.

Sassoon, on the other hand, was a healthy out-of-door Oxford man whose occasional poems on hunting and various outdoor pleasures of English country life were not at all well known, nor were they very important.

Then came 1914 and the World War, and these five men, Noyes, Masefield, Gibson, Brooke, and Sassoon, as well as countless others who had the typical college youth's facility for putting thoughts and feelings into attractive verse-form, plunged into the trenches, and soon the publishing houses of England and America were deluging the land with their rhymed reactions.

From the standpoint of literature there were but few of these "many others" who produced profoundly significant poems in beautiful imperishable verse. There were numerous sincere soldiers who really could not write and who therefore offered us merely a "prodigious welter of tolerable mediocrity." Because of our deep appreciation for all they were doing, for the subjects upon which they wrote, and, above all, for the supreme sacrifice that many of them made, we welcomed their verse, and the more senti-

mental critics led us to believe that it was truly inspired. And though some of it was indeed fine in spirit and pleasing in form, yet for the most part the "forward shining light" was missing.

Take, for example, this chilly sonnet called "1915," by H. A. Nesbitt:

> Year of high hope and disappointment deep,
> Gigantic efforts both by land and sea,
> Neuve Chapelle, Loos, and grim Gallipoli,
> Whose tales of valour make the spirit leap
> With glowing exultation, and then weep
> To think how those brave boys with eager glee
> Defying death, to keep our Britain free,
> Rushed on their fate, and now in silence sleep.
> The opening year saw stretched between the foes
> A barrier of trenches long and wide;
> That barrier stands as firmly at its close
> Despite the thousands who have fought and died.
> Away, thou year of frightfulness and hate,
> The *Lusitania's* doom, sad Serbia's fate.[4]

But not all war poetry was like this. The more important poets, after they had caught their breaths, again began to sing. With the rest of the nation they first accepted war without a doubt as to the holiness of its cause. All were deeply thoughtful, and they were full of war's ideals and exalted purpose. And each one interpreted war as he saw it. Some wrote mere old-time patriotic poetry about England and all her claims and glories. Others simply wrote down the fact of war in one of its countless aspects. Perhaps they sang of sweet wholesome

things in England—the home, college, and rural scenes—that they were doing their best to preserve. Perhaps they interpreted trench life, objectively or subjectively, now as a safety-valve for war emotions, now as a safety-valve for war thoughts. So many men, so many moods! The war of 1914 was not an onlooker's war; the interpretative intellectual poet was there on the spot really to see, and to show others what he saw.

The romanticists were among the first to begin to write. Alfred Noyes, the conventional Victorian, turned from peace poems to war poems without batting an eyelash. His war verse merely reflected the old Noyes with his rhetorical, picturesque phrases and his swinging rhythms. It is Noyes, the conventional romanticist, who pictures "Kilmeny" and other mysterious trawlers going about their grewsome evening tasks. It is the same Noyes who tacks on to his picture of the war, "Search-Lights," the old-time hoop-skirt moral:

> Not far, not far into the night,
> These level swords of light can pierce;
> Yet for her faith does England fight,
> Her faith in this our universe;
> Believing Truth and Justice draw
> From founts of everlasting law; [5]

And it is still the same sincere but rather uninspired poet who writes "A Prayer in Time of War" and "Princeton, May, 1917" with its Tennysonian lyrical stanzas and glittering generalities such as:

Land of new hope, land of the singing stars,
Type of the world to be,
The vision of a world set free from wars
Takes life, takes form, from thee,
Where all the jarring nations of this earth,
Beneath the all-blessing sun,
Brings the new music of mankind to birth,
And make the whole world one.[6]

The more modern Masefield does not leave us so cold. Although his sincere tribute to a fallen comrade on "The Island of Skyros" is simple and effective, and his democratic love for the "men of the tattered battalion which fights till it dies" rather than for the "be-medalled Commander, beloved of the throne" is strikingly told in "A Consecration," Masefield has written but one great war poem. "August, 1914" is one of the lovely imperishable lyrics of the war. How beautifully here does he sing of the dear familiar things that England loves and must preserve through fighting! With what perfect simplicity does he picture the English cornfield at nightfall which the farmers of today, like their forefathers of old, quietly deserted after hearing their country's call, enduring "the misery of the soaking trench" in order to save their dear ones and these twilit pine woods, these distant hills, and these quiet valleys they so loved. And now:

All the unspoken worships of those lives
Spent in forgotten wars at other calls
Glimmers upon these fields where evening drives
Beauty like breath, so gently darkness falls.

. . . . . .

And silence brooks like spirit on the brae,
A glimmering moon begins, the moonlight runs
Over the grasses of the ancient way
Rutted this morning by the passing guns.[7]

Such a picture as this reminds us of the simple perfection of Gray's "Elegy." It is full of heart-breakingly lovely "emotions recollected in tranquillity" and brings the war closer to us than a dozen drum-beating effusions of more strident poets.

It is as fine a spirit of military patriotism as the Cavalier Lovelace gives us in his most perfect lyric:

Tell me not, Sweet, I am unkind,
That from the nunnery
Of thy chaste breast and quiet mind
To war and arms I fly.

True, a new mistress now I chase,
The first foe in the field;
And with a stronger faith embrace
A sword, a horse, a shield.

Yet this inconstancy is such
As you too shall adore;
I could not love thee, Dear, so much,
Loved I not Honour more.

The supreme romanticist of the war was, of course, Rupert Brooke. His fame as a war poet rests entirely upon his five 1914 sonnets: "Peace," "Safety," the two called "The Dead," and "The Soldier." These five sonnets are undoubtedly the most perfect expression of the beauties of sacrifice, of the patriot's joy of dying for his country, that has been given us by

the poets of this age. And because of them, this keen, imaginative, and passionate poet achieves a beautiful immortality.

The poems finely reveal a young soldier's emotions at giving up certain dear things of life to answer England's call. Without regret we find him welcoming the shining privilege of fighting and dying for his mother country. The experience was full of personal splendor for him; and his first sonnet is joyous and exultant as he cries:

> Now, God be thanked Who has matched us with His hour,
> And caught our youth, and wakened us from sleeping.[8]

And serene in his brave conclusion we hear:

> And the worst friend and enemy is but Death.

In the second sonnet, "Safety," Brooke shows the same serenity, but there is now a touch of mysticism as he feels himself aloof and unharmed by war's power, and

> Secretly armed against all death's endeavour . . . .

With the third sonnet he shows us what we have been given by the dead soldiers who renounced their future here:

> Of work and joy, and that unhoped serene,
> That men call age; and those who would have been,
> Their sons, they gave, their immortality.[9]

Honor, Holiness, Love, Nobleness, they gave us.

A beautiful soldier death he again glorifies, in the fourth sonnet, concluding with the poignant lines:

There are waters blown by changing winds to laughter
And lit by the rich skies, all day. And after,
Frost, with a gesture, stays the waves that dance
And wondering loveliness. He leaves a white
Unbroken glory, a gathered radiance,
A width, a shining peace, under the night.[10]

A summing up of the whole matter is found in the matchless fifth sonnet, with its exquisite compression and its unforgettable lines about love for England, death for England, and, in the end, English peace. Here is pure poetry that will live:

If I should die, think only this of me:
That there's some corner of a foreign field
That is forever England. There shall be
In that rich earth a richer dust concealed;
A dust whom England bore, shaped, made aware,
Gave, once, her flowers to love, her ways to roam,
A body of England's, breathing English air,
Washed by the rivers, blest by suns at home.

And think, this heart, all evil shed away,
A pulse in the eternal mind, no less
Gives somewhere back the thoughts by England given;
Her sights and sounds; dreams happy as her day;
And laughter, learnt of friends; and gentleness,
In hearts at peace, under an English heaven.[11]

War to Rupert Brooke was a heroic welcome release from certain uglinesses of life. And he died in beautiful, serene, courageous youth, with his faith in war's sublimities inviolate.

There were other poet-soldiers who gazed upon the great world struggles with the eyes of romanticists. The joyous Julian Grenfell—another of the war's

victims — sings of life's colors and of the "Destined Will," of the joy of battle and of its glories:

> The fighting man shall from the sun
> Take warmth, and life from the glowing earth;
> Speed with the light-foot winds to run
> And with the trees to newer birth;
> And find, when fighting shall be done,
> Great rest, and fullness after dearth.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> The blackbird sings to him, "Brother, brother,
> If this be the last song you shall sing,
> Sing well, for you may not sing another;
> Brother, sing." [12]

And others seem able to mould into beauty the crude and bitter experiences of battle—those who can blind their eyes to ugliness and sing as does Herbert Trench in his "Battle of the Marne":

> The birds flit unafraid
> Through the great cannonade;
> And, O Cannoniers, though ill
> The forests take your skill
> And as by winter nipp'd
> Scatter leaves bullet-stript
> Down the shell-ravaged road—
> Still in its dark abode,
> In the branches of God,
> The Soul sings on alone.[13]

Dazzled by life's nobler moments, these soldiers have their rendezvous with Death and keep faith with those who sleep in Flanders fields.

And there are some like the promising young

Sorley, Charles Hamilton Sorley, the twenty-year-old captain killed in action, who find time amid "the storm, the darkness, and the thunder and the rain" of war to tell Germany that though at the time "the blind fight the blind," later, when peace brings "new-won eyes, . . . We'll grasp firm hands and laugh at the old pain." It is Sorley who finds that Death touches the soldier's bright promise which:

> . . . Stirs, rises, opens and grows sweet
> And blossoms and is you, when you are dead.[14]

And it is Sorley, too, who sounds that poignant religious note in "Expectans Expectavi":

> From morn to midnight, all day through,
> I laugh and play as others do,
> I sin and chatter, just the same
> As others with a different name.
>
> And all year long upon the stage
> I dance and tumble and do rage
> So vehemently, I scarcely see
> The inner and eternal me.
>
> I have a temple I do not
> Visit, a heart I have forgot,
> A self that I have never met,
> A secret shrine — and yet, and yet
>
> This sanctuary of my soul
> Unwitting I keep white and whole,
> Unlatched and lit, if Thou should'st care
> To enter or to tarry there.
>
> With parted lips and outstretched hands
> And listening ears Thy servant stands,
> Call Thou early, call Thou late,
> To Thy great service dedicate.[15]

The Canadian, John McCrae, is perhaps most often quoted of our romantic group. In his perfect rondeau, "In Flanders Fields," we have something more than "a riot of red poppies":

> In Flanders fields the poppies blow
> Between the crosses, row on row,
> That mark our place; and in the sky
> The larks, still bravely singing, fly
> Scarce heard amid the guns below.
>
> We are the Dead. Short days ago
> We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,
> Loved and were loved, and now we lie
> In Flanders fields.
>
> Take up our quarrel with the foe:
> To you from failing hands we throw
> The torch; be yours to hold it high.
> If ye break faith with us who die
> We shall not sleep, though poppies grow
> In Flanders fields.[16]

And others may sing of the familiar things they love and must preserve; of the whispering elm trees; of a Masefieldian harvest time in rural England. Some turn toward thoughts of home and all that was dear to them there, and some dream lovingly of their days at school and college.

Other romanticists write about the youth-and-death, God-and-country, and love-and-home war themes. Some deal with these themes with the utmost sincerity, like W. N. Hodgson in "Back to Rest," who can wholeheartedly sing:

Doubting we charged and conquered—
Hopeless we struck and stood,
Now when the fight is ended
We know that it was good.[17]

But few of these romanticists feel the need of a detailed close-up picture of horrible battlefields with all the appalling filth and cruelty. Perhaps these sensitive poets feared for their sanity and would not allow their minds to dwell on war-as-it-is. Perhaps they were wise in so doing; but often their verse suffered because of this taboo. Only too often it strikes but a very faint echo of war reality.

It is to protest against the romanticist's stand and his glittering generalities, especially against the hollow hurrahs, and camouflaged emotions of hopelessly mediocre versifiers whom I have not space to mention—and these are to be found by the dozens in any anthology of war verse—that a later group of war poets arose, headed by Siegfried Sassoon, a bitter but powerful realist. These "Zolas of the battlefield" began to strip war of its fine tinsel and to show its hideous realities.

Sassoon, the leader of the group, is typical of these realists, typical of Nichols, Graves, Owen, Hueffer, and the others who revolt at war's ugliness, pity its victims, and show the extraordinary degree in which poetry can present the actual color, sound, and horror of battle.

Siegfried Sassoon himself is a poet of extraordinary vitality and of high technical skill Before 1914

he was a fine young English country gentleman who went in for hunting and music, and for idyllic poetry which he himself wrote. Then came war, and he fought in France and in Palestine and won the military cross. And this sensitive, unflinching young man tears away the customary romantic veil and shows us war as he saw it—in all its hideous and ghastly tragedy. He saw his trained soldiers killed in "dud" attacks which never should have been ordered; he saw them in "foul dug-outs, gnawed by rats, and in the ruined trenches, lashed with rain"; he saw them as "corpses rotting" before a front-line trench; he saw them blind, mutilated, shell-shocked wrecks; and he saw many arm-chair patriots preaching war's glories and dismissing its victims with a tepid hurrah.[18] And then, after seeing all this, he cries out bitterly:

> Does it matter?—losing your legs? . . .
> For people will always be kind,
> And you need not show that you mind
> When others come in after hunting
> To gobble their muffins and eggs.
>
> Does it matter?—losing your sight? . . .
> There's such splendid work for the blind;
> And people will always be kind,
> As you sit on the terrace remembering
> And turning your face to the light.
>
> Do they matter?—those dreams from the pit? . . .
> You can drink and forget and be glad,
> And people won't say that you're mad;
> For they'll know that you've fought for your country,
> And no one will worry a bit.[19]

The irony, the bitter irony of this poem, and of "They," and of "To any Dead Officer," and of "Glory of Women" which begins:

> You love us when we're heroes, home on leave,
> Or wounded in a mentionable place.
> You worship decorations . . . .[20]

In "The Dug-Out" we hear him protest:

> Why do you lie with your legs ungainly huddled,
> And one arm bent across your sullen cold
> Exhausted face? It hurts my heart to watch you,
> Deep-shadow'd from the candle's guttering gold;
> And you wonder why I shake you by the shoulder;
> Drowsy, you mumble and sigh and turn your head . . .
> *You are too young to fall asleep for ever;*
> *And when you sleep you remind me of the dead.*[21]

Following this beautiful lyric he sings of "Suicide in the Trenches":

> I knew a simple soldier boy
> Who grinned at life in empty joy,
> Slept soundly through the lonesome dark,
> And whistled early with the lark.
>
> In winter trenches, cowed and glum,
> With crumps and lice and lick of rum,
> He put a bullet through his brain.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> You smug-faced crowds with kindling eye
> Who cheer when soldier lads march by,
> Sneak home and pray you'll never know
> The hell where youth and laughter go.[22]

Bitterness and revolt is here, love for the soldier himself, hatred for the careless who forget him, and

violent anger at war and all its hellish features. Sassoon has indeed made war fearful. His every line bites and burns with stark and terrible truth.

In "A Mystic as Soldier," Sassoon shows himself to be not merely a sincere critic of war but a real poet:

> I lived my days apart,
> Dreaming fair song of God,
> By the glory in my heart
> Covered and crowned and shod.
>
> Now God is in the strife
> And I must seek him there,
> Where death outnumbers life,
> And fury smites the air.
>
> I walk the secret way
> With anger in my brain.
> O music through my clay,
> When will you sound again? [23]

His poem called "Enemies" gives us Sassoon again in a cosmic mood as he shows how the English soldiers were not at war with the individual and deplores the fact that he must slay his brother man in making war upon a system:

> Horror of wounds and anger at the foe,
> And loss of things desired; all these must pass.
> We are the happy legion, for we know
> Time's but a golden wind that shakes the grass.
> There was an hour when we were both to part
> From life we longed to share no less than others,
> Now, having claimed this heritage of heart,
> What need we more, my comrades and my brothers? [24]

The ordered loveliness of these and of such lyrical

poems as "Secret Music," "Before Day," "Before the Battle," "Dream Forest," "Wonderment," "Alone," or "The Last Meeting,"[25] however, fails to show us the later Sassoon, whose poems of passionate protest against war-glamor and stupid brutality are written with such rough intensity, with such angry and sincere conviction. Each poem shows how truly Sassoon believes in those statements he once made to his friend Robert Nichols: "Let no one ever from henceforth say one word in any way countenancing war. It is dangerous even to speak of how here and there the individual may gain some hardship of soul by it. For war is hell, and those who institute it are criminals. Were there even anything to say for it, it should not be said; for its spiritual disasters far outweigh any of its advantages."

Sassoon, indeed, in nearly every poem in "Counter-Attack" and "Picture Show" preserves all his critical faculties and does not hesitate to show the weak places in the military system or the selfishness and hypocrisy of certain stay-at-homes. He sees in war stupidity, madness, foulness, and weary desolation, and he shows all its hideous detail to us from the gun's roar, the stench, gasping breath, mud and lice, to the rain, mosquitoes, and unburied dead. His poems are not pleasant reading; they are a terrible indictment against war and a sincere attempt to put a stop to the wars of tomorrow. Perhaps his work may not be truly great poetry, but there is no doubt at all about its forceful sincerity. He is the poets' Barbusse.

The same note of revolt at war's ugliness, the same pity for its soldier-victims, is clearly shown in the work of other poets; in that, for example, of Sassoon's soldier-comrades, Robert Nichols and Robert Graves. They too cry out that "War does not ennoble, it degrades . . . for war is hell, and those who institute it are criminals."

Nichols—a second lieutenant in the Royal Field Artillery before he was shell-shocked—is an imaginative poet, a lover of beauty. Nevertheless, he takes us with him right into the trenches, into the hideous No-Man's Land, through a fearful night bombardment, and even through the assault—where he gives us an extraordinarily intense and terrible account of what a soldier thinks and feels and sees as he advances toward the enemy:

> . . . Bullets a stream.
> Devouring thought crying in a dream.
> Men, crumpled, going down . . .
> Go on. Go.
> Deafness. Numbness . . .
>
> . . . . . .
>
> The still light: gladness.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Red as blood.
> Germans. Germans.
> Good! O good!
> Cool madness.[26]

This is a different Nichols from the one who first approaches the battlefield:

Nearer and ever nearer . . .
My body, tired but tense,
Hovers 'twixt vague pleasure
And tremulous confidence.

Arms to have and to use them
And a soul to be made
Worthy if not worthy;
If afraid, unafraid.

To endure for a little
To endure and have done:
Men I love about me,
Over me the sun!

And should at last suddenly
Fly the speeding death,
The four great quarters of heaven
Receive this little breath.[27]

This is pure poetry — lyrical in the fullest sense of the term. Nichols the man shows his war-bitterness far more than Nichols the poet, who pictures the selfless comradeship of the trenches in "Fulfilment," [28] in "Comrades: and Episode," [29] and in other poems; the Nichols who so vividly portrays the sacrificial splendor of the Tommies amid the war horrors and heartrending deaths.

Robert Graves, the gay whimsical Irishman of these "three rhyming musketeers," also reacts against the hateful bloody fury of war. He too is a realist, a poet of disillusion. In "A Dead Boche," a grim, terrible poem, he strikes a note similar to that of Siegfried Sassoon:

To you who'd read my songs of War
And only hear of blood and fame,
I'll say (you've heard it said before)
War's Hell . . . ![30]

And although many of Graves' verses are filled with his captivating fantasies and impish humor and a joyous appreciation of peace, we find him now and then remembering the hell of yesterday and brooding over the wars of tomorrow:

Another war soon gets begun,
A dirtier, a more glorious one:
Then, boys, you'll have to play, all in;
It's the cruellest team will win,
So hold your nose against the stink
And never stop too long to think.
Wars don't change except in name;
The next one must go just the same,
And new foul tricks unguessed before
Will win and justify this war.
Kaisers and Czars will strut the stage
Once more with pomp and greed and rage;
Courtly ministers will stop
At home and fight to the last drop;
By the million men will die
In some new horrible agony.[31]

Graves himself was picked up for dead, but he was just conscious enough to hear his rescuers announce this fact. Whereupon he mustered sufficient strength to disillusion them quite. "I'm not dead," he announced as firmly as he could. "I'm damned if I'll die!" Later, in his poem "Escape," [32] he described in a remarkable way his sensations at this time. In another remarkable lyric, "It's a

Queer Time," he gives an account of sensations, memories, and visions that came to him while fighting:

. . . . . .

It's hard to know if you're alive or dead
When steel and fire go roaring through your head.

One moment you'll be crouching at your gun,
Traversing, mowing heaps down half in fun;
The next, you choke and clutch at your right breast—
No time to think—leave all—and off you go . . .
To Treasure Island, where the Spice winds blow,
To lovely groves of mango, quince, and lime—
Breathe no good-bye, but ho, for the Red West!
It's a queer time.

You're charging madly at them, yelling "Flag!"
When somehow something gives, and your feet drag.
You fall and strike your head; yet feel no pain—
And find . . . you're digging tunnels through the hay
In the Big Barn, 'cause it's a rainy day.
Oh, springy hay, and lovely beams to climb!
You're back in the old sailor suit again.
It's a queer time.

Or, you'll be dozing safe in your dug-out—
A great roar—the trench shakes and falls about—
You're struggling, gasping, struggling, then . . . hullo!
Elsie comes tripping gaily down the trench,
Hanky to nose—that lyddite makes a stench—
Getting her pinafore all over grime.
Funny! because she died ten years ago!
It's a queer time.

The trouble is, things happen much too quick;
Up jump the Boches, rifles thump and click,
You stagger, and the whole scene fades away;

Even good Christians don't like passing straight
From Tipperary or their Hymn of Hate
To Alleluiah-chanting and the chime
Of golden harps . . . and . . . I'm not well to-day . . .
It's a queer time.[33]

Soldiers who know tell us that these poems ring extraordinarily true.

There are other poets who have done memorable work, on war subjects. Wilfrid Gibson—the romanticist of yesteryear has done some stark realistic war verse of today, such as this:

I do not fear to die
'Neath the open sky,
To meet death in the fight
Face to face, upright.

But when at last we creep
Into a hole to sleep,
I tremble, cold with dread,
Lest I wake up dead.[34]

Or this:

"Two rows of cabbages,
Two of curly-greens,
Two rows of early peas,
Two of kidney-beans."

That's what he is muttering,
Making such a song,
Keeping other chaps awake,
The whole night long.

Both his legs are shot away,
And his head is light;
So he keeps on muttering
All the blessed night:

"Two rows of cabbages.
Two of curly-greens,
Two rows of early peas,
Two of kidney-beans." [35]

Or again, still feeling "the heart-break in the heart of things, Gibson gives us a vivid little war-time vignette, such as "Housewife":

She must go back, she said,
Because she'd not had time to make the bed.
We'd hurried her away
So roughly . . . and for all that we could say,
She broke from us, and passed
Into the night, shells falling thick and fast.[36]

And it is Gibson who can portray for us that terrible dazed feeling of the soldier who is still groping his way through memories in his war-time nightmare:

They ask me where I've been,
And what I've done and seen.
But what can I reply.
Who know it wasn't I,
But someone, just like me.
Who went across the sea
And with my head and hands
Slew men in foreign lands . . .
Though I must bear the blame
Because he bore my name.[37]

With the poet's eye and ear alert, he shows what fighting means to some individuals. He takes heroism and endurance for granted, and in a simple dramatic direct fashion portrays with Freudian detail the thoughts and feelings and sensations of

different soldiers actually fighting in the trenches. The results, as we have seen, are stark, biting, grimly humorous pictures in eight or ten lines of conventional meters that we never forget; such as those already quoted, or "The Joke," "Hill-Born," "His Father," or many others with such a mixture of romance and reality as we find in "Hit":

> Out of the sparkling sea
> I drew my tingling body clear, and lay
> On a low ledge the livelong summer day,
> Basking, and watching lazily
> White sails in Falmouth Bay.
>
> My body seemed to burn
> Salt in the sun that drenches it through and through
> Till every particle glowed clean and new
> And slowly seemed to turn
> To lucent amber in a world of blue.
>
> I felt a sudden wrench—
> A trickle of warm blood—
> And found that I was sprawling in the mud
> Among the dead men in the trench.[38]

Richard Aldington is another poet who has written some muffled bitter plaints of rebellion. But the war with its dirt and vermin, its cold, its evil smells and fatigue, has been almost too much for his sensitive, beauty-hungry spirit. He has produced few very noteworthy poems, although "Terror" and "The Blood of Young Men," which are written in his own vivid, imagistic fashion, are distinctly worth while.

Among the more artistic of these poets whose work realistically reflected the terrible spectacle of war at close quarters was Wilfred Owen, a keenly sensitive poet, who died at about Armistice time. A follower of Sassoon's realism, Owen pictures "drooping tongues" and "treading blood from lungs," and "the batter of guns and shatter of flying muscles." But at moments the idealistic note creeps in, and we find him singing:

I have perceived much beauty
In the hoarse oaths that kept our courage straight;
Heard music in the silentness of duty;
Found place where shell-storm spouted reddest spate.
Nevertheless, except you share
With them in hell the sorrowful dark of hell,
Whose world is but the trembling of a flare,
And heaven but as the highway for a shell.
You shall not hear their mirth;
You shall not come to think them well content
By any jest of mine. These men are worth
Your tears: You are not worth their merriment.[39]

With what extraordinary power does he picture the strange dream of meeting with the enemy he had killed:

It seemed that out of the battle I escaped
Down some profound dull tunnel, long since scooped
Through granites which Titanic wars had groined.
Yet also there encumbered sleepers groaned,
Too fast in thought or death to be bestirred.
Then, as I probed them, one sprang up, and stared
With piteous recognition in fixed eyes,
Lifting distressful hands as if to bless.
And by his smile, I knew that sullen hall;

With a thousand fears that vision's face was grained;
Yet no blood reached there from the upper ground,
And no guns thumped, or down the flues made moan.
"Strange, friend," I said, "here is no cause to mourn."
"None," said the other, "save the undone years,
The hopelessness. Whatever hope is yours,
Was my life also." [40]

And what profound, even magnificent self-revelation does he show in that beautifully piteous cry of his beginning:

Red lips are not so red
As the strained stones kissed by the English dead.
Kindness of wooed and wooer
Seems shame to their love pure.
O Love, your eyes lose lure
When I behold eyes blinded in my stead! [41]

In this poem Owen also experimented with assonance and dissonance. But mere technical skill, despite its indirect power, will probably be lost sight of as we take in the humanity of his message.

Owen himself tells us in that preface to his one small volume—published some two years after his death—that:

Above all, this book is not concerned with Poetry.
The subject of it is War, and the pity of War.
The Poetry is in the pity. [42]

This pity shows itself in all his poetry. It is not rebellion but pity and regret and tranquil acquiescence, for instance, that is found here:

What passing-bells for these who die as cattle?
  Only the monstrous anger of the guns.
Only the stuttering rifles' rapid rattle
  Can patter out their hasty orisons.
No mockeries for them; no prayers nor bells,
  Nor any voice of mourning save the choirs,—
The shrill, demented choirs of wailing shells;
  And bugles calling for them from sad shires.

What candles may be held to speed them all?
  Not in the hands of boys, but in their eyes
Shall shine the holy glimmers of goodbyes.
  The pallor of girls' brows shall be their pall;
Their flowers the tenderness of patient minds,
And each slow dusk a drawing-down of blinds.[43]

There is pity, too, for what war has done to men's bodies and senses and souls in these concluding lines of "A Terre":

Some day, no doubt, if . . .
      Friend, be very sure
I shall be better off with plants that share
More peaceably the meadow and the shower,
Soft rains will touch me,—as they could touch once,
And nothing but the sun shall make me ware.
Your guns may crash around me. I'll not hear;
Or, if I wince, I shall not know I wince.
Don't take my soul's poor comfort for your jest.
Soldiers may grow a soul when turned to fronds,
But here the thing's best left at home with friends.

My soul's a little grief, grappling your chest,
To climb your throat on sobs; easily chased
On other sighs and wiped by fresher winds.

Carry my crying spirit till it's weaned
To do without what blood remained these wounds.[44]

Not about heroes, not about "deeds or lands, not anything about "glory, honor, dominion, or power" do we find here; only the pity, the horrible pity of war and a clear picture of war-sufferers as a warning to future generations that may again plunge into its bloody chaos. "All the poet can do today is to warn. That is why the true poets must be truthful," he cries. This, indeed, was Wilfred Owen's aim, and some of his warnings took on imperishable form.

But we cannot leave the trench poets of today without mentioning a twentieth-century poet who, after going through four years of war's agony, realizes deeply its sublimities of sacrifice and of devotion. The poems of Ford Madox Hueffer, vivid, skillfully written, and wonderfully effective, are tinged not at all with pulpit propaganda, yet they hint at the underlying significance of his war subject-matter. What a marvelous war picture he gives us of Charing Cross Station at midnight, where in the gloom the women of Flanders await their lost "that shall never again come by the train to the embraces of all these women with dead faces."[45] It is a poignant cry of pain and pity, and it is wonderfully expressed. Here again is a poet in the trenches amid dust and corpses and gas shells who yet hears the larks singing above him and can dream of home in "the Golden Valley down by Tintern on the Wye." [46]

All the pain and agony of the trenches is expressed

between the lines of "A Solis Ortus Cardine," where the war-weary soldier prays to his home-folk and to the soldier sleeping in No Man's Land, for remembrance in their prayers. And what a picture he draws for us of the old sardonic window-eyes in "The Old Houses of Flanders": [47] "Very old eyes that have watched the ways of men for generations" and that now are no more! He accomplishes as much in this brief poem on war ruins as Dunsany does in his whole series of after-war vignettes, "Unhappy Far-Off Things."

And in "Footsloggers" what a picture he gives us of a dazed soldier, of the rapid, vivid, but very jumbled series of war impressions that flit across his consciousness! We see him on his first leave ironically gazing at the city bums and slackers and wondering whether these are what he is to die for. We see him in the trenches

> When just for moments, landscapes out in France
> Looked so like English downlands that the heart
> Checked and stood still . . . [48]

We see him remembering vaguely the "drafts going off in the rain to shaken music" and "the silken flutter of silent, ceremonial parades," and remembering, too, the Battalion concerts:

> . . . In the shafts of light
> From smoking lamps: the lines of queer, warped faces
> Of men that now are dead: faces lit up
> By inarticulate minds at sugary chords
> From the vamping pianist beneath the bunting:
> "Until the boys come home!" we sing.

And fumes
Of wet humanity, soaked uniforms,
Wet flooring, smoking lamps, fill cubical
And wooden-walled spaces, brown, all brown,
With the light-sucking hue of khaki . . . " [49]

Such poems are almost great.

While England was showing these poetic reactions to the Great War, what about Ireland? From our knowledge of the historic relations between England and Ireland, and of the psychology of the Celt, we might expect the Irish poets to show a somewhat different reaction from that of English singers and to make their own peculiar contribution to war poetry. And such is the case.

The strongest note sounded in the output of the Irish war poets is pathos. Irish poetry is wont to strike a minor strain in times of peace; and in war time this strain was most pronounced. Any of the Irish war songs have a peculiarly heart-breaking plaintiveness. Take, for instance, the poems of Patrick MacGill, a trench poet. It is difficult to read without tears such verses as "The Star-Shell":

A star-shell holds the sky beyond
Shell-shivered Loos, and drops
In million sparkles on a pond
That lies by Hulluch copse.

A moment's brightness in the sky,
To vanish at a breath,
And die away, as soldiers die
Upon the wastes of death.[50]

His two other most notable poems, "Before the

Charge" and "In the Morning," [51] have this same quality of conveying great pathos in a few simple phrases.

It was the pathos of common things which moved that poet of great promise, Francis Ledwidge, who was killed in action in 1917. Instead of the horrible details of trench life and battle charges, he presents such pictures as "Autumn Evening in Serbia," a sight of "Evening Clouds" which calls up memories of home, and "The Place":

> And when the war is over, I shall take
> My lute a-down to it and sing again
> Songs of the whispering things amongst the brake,
> And those I love shall know them by their strain.
> Their airs shall be the blackbird's twilight song,
> Their words shall be all flowers with fresh dews hoar.
> But it is lonely now in winter long,
> And, God! to hear the blackbird sing once more [52]

This same poignant note of pathos appears in the non-combatant poets. Katherine Tynan's "High Summer" is an instance:

> Pinks and syringa in the garden closes,
>
> . . . . . .
>
> *They die in Flanders to keep these for me.*
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Daisies leaping in foam on the green grasses,
> The dappled sky and the stream that sings as it passes;
> These are bought with a price, a biter foe,
> *They die in Flanders to keep these for me.* [53]

Another woman poet of Ireland, Winifred M. Letts, has written several notable poems of pathos

inspired by the war. The most beautiful of these is that in which is so delicately portrayed "the grey Spires of Oxford." We see the cricket field, the quad whose "careless boys" at play "took the khaki and the gun instead of cap and gown," and went abroad to die. A beautiful vignette is this, of the old college, lonely and brooding by the peaceful river and longing again for the voices it will never hear, voices of Oxford men "who gave their merry youth away for country and for God." The cry of longing and of pitying approval and resignation is here uttered in tones that are sincere and universal.[54]

In many of the Irish war poems there is expressed a passionate love for Erin, and a hope that the struggle may have something to do toward the liberation of that land. In Stephen Gwynn's "The Irish Brigade, 1914," this trench poet expresses in ringing tones his love for Ireland:

> Not for ourselves, but for our sons, and for the blessed sake
> Of Ireland and of freedom, be the high resolve we take;
> The work begun cannot be done, our warfare may not cease,
> Till on the hearth of Liberty we have established—Peace.[55]

In a different tone this same hope that the war may not be fought in vain, so far as Ireland is concerned, is sounded in Norreys Jephson O'Conor's lines, "For Francis Ledwidge":

> You will not sleep beneath a mound where kings
> Were coffin'd long ago in carven stone
> And dream in peace amid an emerald land
> Of many memories and swift-wing's song.
> And yet I think that you are not forgotten.[56]

In contrast with this, but dominated by the same love of Ireland, are the lilting strains of Winifred M. Letts' "The Connaught Rangers":

I saw the Connaught rangers when they were passing by,
On a spring day, a good day, with gold rifts in the sky.
Themselves were marching steadily along the Liffey quay
An' I see the young proud look of them as if it was today!
The bright lads, the right lads, I have them in my mind,
With the green flags on their bayonets all fluttering in the wind!

. . . . . .

But when they march before Him, God's welcome will be kind,
And the green flags on their bayonets will flutter in the wind! [57]

From the first, there was a disposition on the part of Irish poets to view the struggle as a thing apart from their interest—something that belonged not to them but to the empire which holds their land in subjection. This attitude enabled the greater poets to look on the conflict from the standpoint of a citizen. Note, for example, George Russell's (A.E.) "Gods of War," which concludes:

O outcast Christ, it was too soon
For flags of battle to be furled
While life was yet at the hot noon.
Come in the twilight of the world;
Its kings may greet Thee without scorn
And crown Thee then without a thorn.[58]

This is the reaction of a man of broad and cosmopolitan mind as he looks upon the failure of Christianity to prevent war.

More passionately this same mood finds expression in Russell's poem "Shadows and Lights":

What is a nation but a multitude
United by some god-begotten mood,
Some hope of liberty or dream of power
That have not with each other brotherhood
But warred in spirit from their natal hour,
Their hatred god-begotten as their love,
Reverberations of eternal strife?
For all that fury breathed in human life,
Are ye not guilty, answer, ye above? [59]

In America, the greater events and larger aspects of the war were echoed by a number of our poets during 1914 and 1915. For instance, there is Amy Lowell's "The Bombardment," inspired by the fate of the Rheims Cathedral; there is Josephine Preston Peabody's "Men Have Wings at Last"; "The Return of August," by Percy MacKaye; "Sonnets Written in the Fall of 1914," by George Edward Woodberry; and "The White Ships and the Red," written on the fate of the Titanic by Joyce Kilmer.

In these first reactions the dominant emotion was amazement mingled with horror at the deeds of the Hun and pity for his victims. Only rarely do we find any recognition of approaching national danger, such as is expressed in Woodberry's sonnets:

And westward borne that planetary sweep,
Darkening o'er England and her times to be,
Already steps upon the ocean-deep!
Watch well, my country, that unearthly sea,
Lest when thou thinkest not, and in thy sleep,
Unapt for war, that gloom enshadow thee! [60]

Toward the close of the year we can detect in much of the current poetry indications of the awak-

ening of the national conscience. A poem typical of this attitude is written by one of our minor poets, Charles Hanson Towne. This first appeared in *Everybody's* in 1915:

> America! They blaspheme and they lie
> Who say these are the voices of your sons!
> In this foul night, when nations sink and die,
> No thought is here save for the fallen ones.
> Who, underneath the ruin of old thrones,
> Suffer and bleed, and tell the world good bye! [61]

Then in 1916 there came a widening stream of poetry of this sort, expressive of our inability to keep aloof from the conflict, and of our kinship with the peoples of France and England, and of our responsibility to go to their aid. This reached its flood when a state of war with Germany was announced in 1917. A very fury of patriotism seemed to be carrying our poets onward. But it was a patriotism somewhat different from that of the British poets. It was keyed to a new note—that of helping to "make the world safe for democracy." This sentiment finds noble expression in many of the verses of the non-combatants, notably in that of Percy MacKaye, and in the "Ode of Dedication" by Hermann Hagedorn, read before the Harvard Chapter of Phi Beta Kappa on June 18, 1917:

> Once more a dream is single lord of men!
> Yea, we will rise and go, and face disaster
> And want and wounds and death in some far fen,
> Having no king, but a great dream for master!—
>
> . . . . . .

God, who gavest men eyes,
God, who gavest men heart
To see a dream;
To follow the Gleam;

. . . . . .

God, who lovest free men,
Lead on! We come.[62]

Thus spoke the classic muse in America at the beginning of the war. The accents are reminiscent of those of Lowell's "Commemoration Ode," written on a similar occasion in Civil War times; and the theme of battling for freedom is the natural heritage of American poets.

Composers of the new poetry also wrote in this romantic vein. For instance, there is Vachel Lindsay's "Niagara":

Within the town of Buffalo
Are prosy men with leaden eyes;
Like ants they worry to and fro
(Important men in Buffalo.)
But only twenty miles away
A deathless glory is at play:
Niagara, Niagara.

. . . . . .

What marching men of Buffalo
Flood the streets in rash crusade?
Fools-to-free-the-world, they go,
Primeval hearts from Buffalo.
Red cataracts of France today
Awake, three thousand miles away
An echo of Niagara,
The cataract Niagara.[63]

Edgar Lee Masters temporarily left his Spoon River verse and burst forth with "Draw the Sword, O Republic!"

You have been a leaven in the earth, O Republic!
And a watch-fire on the hill-top scattering sparks;
And an eagle clanging his wings on a cloud-wrapped promontory;
Now the leaven must be stirred,
And the brands themselves carried and touched
To the jungles and the black-forests.[64]

Meanwhile, during this outpouring of idealistic and altruistic sentiments from the poets of America who were viewing the conflict from the vantage ground offered on this side of the water, the men "over there" had begun to write down their reactions to trench life. Their verses were sent home and many were published in newspapers and periodicals. Most of these are mediocre in quality and conventional in treatment. Few of them reach the general level of the British verse produced by men in the trenches—probably for the reason that, compared with the British fighting force, the A. E. F. took comparatively few of our young men.

Out of all the American trench poets there are but a few who have any considerable claim to literary recognition. The American poet of greatest promise was Joyce Kilmer, who fought for France in the American Legion, and lost his life in the war. At the beginning of the war he was a contributor to various periodicals and a critic and collector of verse. He had been reared in a literary atmosphere and

seemed destined to lead a quiet and delightful life as literary editor of *The Churchman*. He was regarded as an editor and critic who had arrived, and as a writer of promise. Conservative in thought and style, and a devoted son of the Roman Catholic Church, he was sometimes referred to as its poet laureate.

Then came the sinking of the Lusitania, and his chivalrous Irish blood grew hot with righteous indignation. In his poem "The White Ships and the Red" he pours forth a denunciation of the deed and pictures the judgment scene at which the victims cry for vengeance:

> When God's great voice assembles
> The fleets on Judgment Day,
> The ghosts of ruined ships will rise
> In sea and strait and bay.
> Though they have lain for ages
> Beneath the changeless flood,
> They shall be white as silver;
> But one—shall be like blood.[65]

Joyce Kilmer was a fighter; he hated a pacifist; and within three weeks after the United States entered the war he had resigned from the Reserve Officers' Training Corps and enlisted as a private in the Seventh Regiment, New York. Later he was transferred at his own request to a unit of the Rainbow Division made up of the "wild Irish boys" he liked best of all. Eventually he was transferred to Headquarters Company and made senior regimental statistician.

From France Kilmer wrote back that it was "the pleasantest war he had ever attended." He entered it with joy in the conflict, and his verse is tinged with patriotic and religious fervor. His reaction is that of the English romanticists. The best known of his war poems is "Rouge Bouquet":

In a wood they call the Rouge Bouquet
There is a new-made grave today,
Built by never a spade nor pick
Yet covered with earth ten metres thick.
There lie many fighting men,
  Dead in their youthful prime,
Never to laugh nor love again
  Nor taste the Summertime.
For Death came flying through the air
And stopped his flight at the dugout stair,
Touched his prey and left them there,
  Clay to clay.

. . . . . .

There is on earth no worthier grave
To hold the bodies of the brave
Than this place of pain and pride
Where they nobly fought and nobly died.
Never fear but in the skies
Saints and angels stand
Smiling with their holy eyes
  On this new-come band.

. . . . . .

And up to heaven's doorway floats,
  From the wood called Rouge Bouquet,
A delicate cloud of buglenotes
  That softly say:
"Farewell!
Farewell!
Comrades true, born anew, peace to you!

Your souls shall be where the heroes are
And your memory shine like the morning-star.
Brave and dear,
Shield us here.
Farewell!" [66]

In his other war poems—there are but five in all—Kilmer shows the same romantic, religious, Celtic blend.

Kilmer was killed in action, July 30, 1918. Whether his war experiences would have led him to produce really great poetry is problematical. He wrote home: "To tell the truth, I am not at all interested in writing nowadays, except in so far as writing is the expression of something beautiful And I see daily and nightly the expression of beauty in action instead of words, and I find it more satisfactory . . . . The only sort of book I care to write about the war is the sort people will read after the war is over—a century after it is over!" [67]

There is nothing here to indicate that war's ugliness would have bitten into the soul of this poet and turned him into the Sassoon type of realist. He was prepossessed by the romantic point of view and could probably never have shown us war as it actually is nor have penetrated to its inner meaning.

Another romanticist was Alan Seeger, of New England stock and Harvard schooling, but of considerable experience in foreign living, particularly in Mexico and in Paris. He was a literary man, but had written nothing of any particular note up to the time of the war.

A devoted lover of Paris, it was the natural thing for Seeger to enlist in the Foreign Legion. To the *New Republic* he wrote: "Suddenly the world is up in arms. All mankind takes sides. The same faith that makes him surrender himself to the impulses of normal living and of love, forces him now to make himself the instrument through which a greater force works out its inscrutable ends. . . . And with no less a sense of moving in harmony with a universe where masses are in continual conflict and new combinations are engendered out of eternal collisions, he shoulders arms and marches forth with haste.[68]

This passage is interesting because it shows Seeger's fatalistic mood. The much-quoted "I Have a Rendezvous with Death" is a poetic expression of this same fatalism. It might have been written in the days of chivalry, so far as the sentiment is concerned. It portrays the gallant soldier flinging himself at death as a glad adventure ordered by fate. It was on the fourth of July, 1916, that Seeger lost his life in action.

His "Ode in Memory of the American Volunteers Fallen for France," which was to have been read on Decoration Day, May 30, expresses the conventionally correct sentiments of America for France. "A Message to America," though written in the new manner, has a spirit that we feel is somehow not in accord with the manner. There is nothing new in the message—it is simply an urge to America to do her duty.

You have the grit and the guts, I know;
You are ready to answer blow for blow,
You are virile, combative, stubborn, hard,
But your honor ends with your own back-yard;
Each man intent on his private goal,
You have no feeling for the whole.[69]

There is a sharper tang and a newer note in Sonnet XI, "On Returning to the Front After Leave":

Apart sweet women (for whom heaven be blessed),
Comrades, you cannot think how thin and blue
Look the leftovers of mankind that rest,
Now that the cream has been skimmed off in you.
War has its horrors but has this of good—
That it's sure processes sort out and bind
Brave hearts in one intrepid brotherhood
And leave the shams and imbeciles behind.
Now turn we joyful to the great attacks,
Not only that we face in a fair field
Our valiant foe and all his deadly tools,
But also that we turn disdainful backs
On that poor world we scorn, yet die to shield—
That world of cowards, hypocrites, and fools.[70]

This is egotistic and bitter, but it has a frank and virile tone that indicates the effect of war's hardening process on this delicate spirit. Whether this process would have continued, and what the final effect would have been, we can only guess; as it is, Seeger's beautiful verses will live among the most wonderfully effective expressions of the romantic reaction to the war.

Though a good deal of realistic verse was produced in the American trenches very little of it is of real

merit. It was left to a very few, among them, Robert W. Service, to portray the horrible details of war and to give those at home some idea of its effect on the soldiers.

One of the most vivid and heart-rending of Service's poems is "On the Wire." It portrays the terrible sufferings of a soldier caught on the wire and exposed to the burning rays of the sun till driven to suicide. In his agony he exclaims:

O God, take the sun from the sky!
  It's burning me, scorching me up.
God, can't you hear my cry?
  Water! a poor little cup!

. . . . . .

It is laughing the cursed sun!
See how it swells and swells
Fierce as a hundred hells!

. . . . . .

See, it's the size of the sky,
And the sky is a torrent of fire.
Foaming on me as I lie
Here on the wire . . . the wire.[71]

In his poem "The Lark," Service shows some real lyric ability:

A fusilade of melody,
  That sprays us from yon trench of sky;
A new amazing enemy
  We cannot silence though we try;
A battery on radiant wings,
  That from yon gap of golden fleece
Hurls at us hopes of such strange things
  As joy and home and love and peace.

Pure heart of song! do you not know
That we are making earth a hell?
Or is it that you try to show
Life still is joy and all is well?
Brave little wings! Ah, not in vain
You beat into that bit of blue:
Lo! we who pant in war's red rain
Lift shining eyes, see Heaven too.[72]

Rarely does the general level of American trench poetry reach even the height of this decidedly mediocre verse. The muse in arms, so far as America is concerned, gave us nothing new or very notable.

The poems selected for consideration here are gathered from only a few of the thousands of volumes inspired by the late war, but they are characteristic of the thoughts and feelings expressed by our leading poets about the most terrible struggle in history. For the most part these poems indicate the usual reactions toward a struggle which involves one's native land. In Ireland these reactions were colored by emotions aroused by peculiar political conditions and by peculiar tendencies of the Celtic mind. In America the tendency was to glorify those ideals of democracy which we are accustomed to believe in, and to eulogize the act of entering into war to uphold those ideals.

Of the soldier-poets, some—for example, Rupert Brooke and Alan Seeger—were dazzled by the beauty of sacrificing one's life to save one's country. For such as these the ugliness of war is overshadowed by the spiritual significance which they find in the

"trial by fire." The greater singers of this group perished early on the field of action; their "Rendezvous with Death" came too soon for us to judge of the ultimate effect of war on their verse.

Others, like Siegfried Sassoon, for example, tired of the babble and pretty egotistic lyrics of the less sincere romanticists, were moved to depict the ghastly reality of war as they had found it through bitter experience. War shook them out of the conventional rut and led them to make poetry out of ugly, forbidden subjects. Their work shows a healthy reaction against sentimentalism, and some of it is distinctly good verse.

We may venture, then, to conclude that the World War of 1914–1918 has made our poets more sincere, frank, questioning, analytical, unconventional, and vivid than has any war of the past. The old-time arm-chair, gold-lace, parade, glory-of-war poetry, with its false values and false effects upon readers of of a later day, keeping alive war interest, is in decided contrast to the stark realism of much of today's verse, marked, as it is, by its very truthfulness in detail and attitude and motive. Is it not possible that such realism may exert on posterity influence as a war deterrent?

The experiences of 1914 to 1918 seem just now beyond the reach of words; and silence, an awesome silence, reigns. What will be the war emotions recollected with truth and beauty in the tranquillity of tomorrow? This for the future to reveal; but perhaps Siegfried Sassoon, who is even the bitterest of

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our real soldier-poets, has already glimpsed its spirit, when he sings:

Everyone suddenly burst out singing;
And I was filled with such delight
As prisoned birds must find in freedom,
Winging wildly across the white
Orchards and dark-green fields; on; on; and out of sight.[73]

NOTES

1. "The Going," a tribute to Rupert Brooke. From *Poems*, by Wilfrid Wilson Gibson, p. 440.
2. See Holman, *Poems of the Great War*, p. 168.
3. *Selected Poems* of Thomas Hardy, p. 199.
4. Nesbitt, *Neuve Chapelle and Other Poems*, p. 9.
5. *Collected Poems*, by Alfred Noyes, Vol. III.
6. *Collected Poems*, by Alfred Noyes, Vol. III.
7. *Masefield's Collected Poems*, p. 376.
8. *Collected Poems of Rupert Brooke*, p. 107.
9. *Collected Poems of Rupert Brooke*, p. 109.
10. *Collected Poems of Rupert Brooke*, p. 110.
11. *Collected Poems of Rupert Brooke*, p. 111.
12. *A Treasury of War Poetry*, p. 154.
13. *Poems*, by Herbert Trench, p. 216.
14. Sorley, *Marlborough and Other Poems*, p. 73.
15. Sorley, *Marlborough and Other Poems*, p. 68.
16. McCrae, *In Flanders Fields*, p. 3.
17. Hodgson, *Verse and Prose in Peace and War*, p. 35.
18. Sassoon, *Counter-Attack and Other Poems*, p. 19.
19. Sassoon, *Counter-Attack and Other Poems*, p. 28.
20. Sassoon, *Counter-Attack and Other Poems*, p. 32.
21. Davies, *Shorter Lyrics of the Twentieth Century*, p. 147.
22. Sassoon, *Counter-Attack and Other Poems*, p. 31.
23. Sassoon, *The Old Huntsman*, p. 20.
24. Sassoon, *The Old Huntsman*, p. 20.
25. For these poems see *The Old Huntsman*, pp. 54, 66, 75, 79, 83, 89, 97.
26. Nichols, *Ardours and Endurances*, p. 41.
27. Nichols, *Ardours and Endurances*, p. 15.
28. Nichols, *Ardours and Endurances*, p. 44.
29. Nichols, *Ardours and Endurances*, p. 22.
30. Graves, *Fairies and Fusiliers*, p. 35.
31. Graves, *Fairies and Fusiliers*, p. 52.
32. Graves, *Fairies and Fusiliers*, p. 63.
33. See Untermeyer, *Modern British Poetry*, p. 353–354.

34. *Poems*, by Wilfrid Wilson Gibson, p. 415.
35. *Poems*, by Wilfrid Wilson Gibson, p. 416.
36. *Poems*, by Wilfrid Wilson Gibson, p. 432.
37. *Poems*, by Wilfrid Wilson Gibson, p. 427.
38. *Poems*, by Wilfrid Wilson Gibson, p. 426.
39. "Apologia Pro Poemate Meo." *Poems*, by Wilfred Owen, p. 4.
40. "Strange Meeting." *Poems*, by Wilfred Owen, p. 1.
41. *Poems*, by Wilfred Owen, p. 3.
42. *Poems*, by Wilfred Owen, Preface, p. vii.
43. *Poems*, by Wilfred Owen, p. 11.
44. *Poems*, by Wilfred Owen, p. 29.
45. Hueffer, *Antwerp*, p. 25.
46. Hueffer, *Antwerp*. p. 35.
47. Hueffer, *Antwerp*, p. 39.
48. Hueffer, *On Heaven and Other Poems*, p. 62.
49. Hueffer, *On Heaven and Other Poems*, p. 62.
50. MacGill, *The Great Push*, p. 187.
51. MacGill, *The Great Push*, p. 155.
52. *Poems of Francis Ledwidge*.
53. See Clarke, *A Treasury of War Poetry*, p. 166.
54. Letts, *Spires of Oxford and Other Poems*, p. 3.
55. See *Literary Digest*, May 19, 1917.
56. See Clarke, *A Treasury of War Poetry*, p. 280.
57. See Clarke, *A Treasury of War Poetry*, p. 34.
58. See Clarke, *A Treasury of War Poetry*, p. 102.
59. See Clarke, *A Treasury of War Poetry*, p. 130.
60. Woodberry, *The Roamer and Other Poems*, Sonnet IV, p. 192.
61. Towne, *Today and Tomorrow*, p. 22.
62. See *Braithwaite's Yearbook for 1917*, p. 126.
63. Lindsay, *Collected Poems*, p. 54.
64. Masters, *Toward the Gulf*, p. 168.
65. *Poems, Essays and Letters of Joyce Kilmer*, Vol. I, p. 173.
66. *Poems, Essays and Letters of Joyce Kilmer*, Vol. I, p. 105.
67. Quoted in *Memoir to Work*, Vol. I, p. 89.
68. *Poems*, by Alan Seeger. Introduction, p. xxvi.
69. *Poems*, by Alan Seeger, p. 162.
70. *Poems*, by Alan Seeger, p. 155.
71. Service, *Rhymes of a Red Cross Man*, p. 74.
72. Service, *Rhymes of a Red Cross Man*, p. 37.
73. Sassoon, *War Poems*, p. 95.

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